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27 May 1966

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE VULNERABILITY OF NON-COMMUNIST GROUPS
IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO VIET CONG POLITICAL SUBVERSION

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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No. 0829/86

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
27 May 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM*

The Vulnerability of Non-Communist Groups
In South Vietnam to Viet Cong Political Subversion

SUMMARY

After many years of concentration on the rural populace, where the presence of their armed forces facilitated pressure and intimidation, the Communists began in 1964 to put more muscle into building an urban apparatus capable of giving them access to the important, politically conscious groups in the cities of South Vietnam.

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The Communists anticipated the outbreak of anti-Ky agitation this spring and have been making efforts to penetrate the antiregime "struggle" movement. At the same time, they have been cautious in their overtures to the "struggle" elements, apparently regarding them as exploitable, but not dependable. There is unconfirmed evidence that the Viet Cong have penetrated the movement in the Da Nang area, and probably in Hue, but it does not appear that the Communists as yet exercise any substantial leverage with the "struggle" group.

There is extensive evidence of Communist proselytization and recruitment efforts among the youth and students in the cities of South Vietnam. Youth as a whole, however, in the urban areas is not responsive to Viet Cong influence. There are indications that a substantial element of Communist sympathizers exists among the students at Hue University where there are a variety of extremist influences in play. At Saigon University, the bulk of the 16,000 students have tended to take a conservative stance in the political agitation of the past year.

*Prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence; co-ordinated with ONE and DDP.

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Among the Viet Cong's top priority targets also are the labor organizations of the cities of South Vietnam. The Communists have scored some significant inroads among the textile workers around Saigon, and in some other groups such as the transportation workers. There is, however, no real indication that the leadership of the more important unions is pro-Communist. The top union officials and the government are aware of the Communist threat and are active in blocking Communist penetration efforts.

The Communists have also been relatively unsuccessful in penetrating the leadership of the religious groups of South Vietnam. While eager to exploit the disruptive tactics of the Buddhists, the Viet Cong are wary of their political aspirations. The Communists have, however, had some success in influencing Buddhist followers over which the bonzes do not appear to have full control. Communist influence among the Catholics, the Hoa Hao, and the Cao Dai is believed to be negligible.

Viet Cong tactics in dealing with the main political parties in South Vietnam appear primarily defensive in nature. The leaders of these parties are often denounced openly by the Communists as "puppets" and "reactionaries." Although there is little evidence of an affinity between the Viet Cong and non-Communist urban politicians and intellectuals, there is good evidence that contacts between them are easily arranged.

The Communists have made especially intensive efforts to infiltrate and subvert South Vietnam's armed forces, both to obtain intelligence and to sap their will to fight. Communist efforts at political subversion among the regular forces have not been very successful, and probably will not be so long as the military and security situation does not deteriorate seriously.

Viet Cong influence on all non-Communist elements in South Vietnam, in fact, will probably continue to be determined largely by the degree of military control which the Viet Cong can exert over populated areas.

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I. Overall Subversive Strategy

1. The penetration and exploitation of all politically significant groups in South Vietnam has always been a basic aim of Vietnamese Communist strategy. The Geneva Conference of 1954 was hardly over, for example, before party members remaining in the South were ordered to "secretly become the basic element" in some popular or governmental organization so as to be "ready for the fight" when the time proved ripe for a Communist takeover.

2. For many years the Communists concentrated their political action efforts among the populace in the rural areas, where the presence of their armed forces facilitated pressure and intimidation. Their ability to subvert and exploit the politically significant groups in the cities remained negligible. They were thus unable to take advantage of the situation created by the overthrow of Diem in 1963 and by the subsequent urban instability to incite or direct significant agitation in the cities. In 1964, the Communists began to put more muscle into building an urban apparatus capable of giving them access to the population of the cities. There is evidence that in 1965, they greatly expanded their recruitment efforts in Saigon and in the various provincial capitals, dispatching trained party cadres from the rural areas to carry out proselytizing efforts. [It is estimated that their efforts in the Saigon-Cholon area alone could have netted some 1,500-3,000 new party activists during 1965.]

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3. The Communists have several objectives in attempting to infiltrate the urban political groups. At the maximum, they seek to place party members, or party-controlled individuals, in influential positions in these groups. The activity of the group can then be controlled and directed in a fashion serving Communist interests. They apparently have had only very limited success in this regard, although the extremist, opportunist tactics of some individuals in a few politically important groups in South Vietnam has often served indirectly to benefit Communist objectives.

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4. In dealing with certain organized intellectual or religious groups and political parties in South Vietnam, the Communists have taken a partly defensive stance. Apparently unable to exert any significant appeal in such circles, the Communists have sought rather to block or to disrupt the efforts of such groups to expand their political influence at the provincial level. This has been true, for example, of Communist tactics in dealing with the Catholics and even the Buddhists, and with political parties such as the VNQDD, an old-time nationalist political party.

5. The Communists appear to have been more successful in infiltrating or otherwise directly influencing the rank and file membership of certain other politically significant elements in South Vietnam, particularly labor and student groups. In some ways, penetration at this level better serves Communist purposes, since it allows the Communists to promote disorder and disunity and thus undermine the non-Communist cause. At the same time, it allows the Communists to avoid direct commitments to non-Communist organizations, such as might become necessary if they were tied in significantly with the leadership of these groups.

6. On balance, it appears probable that the Communists will not be able to gain more than a limited degree of influence through subversion with any politically significant element of the urban population in South Vietnam, so long as political, military, and security conditions in the country do not seriously deteriorate beyond their present status. Viet Cong influence will, in fact, probably continue to be largely determined by the degree of Communist military control over populated areas.

II. The Vulnerability of Mass Organizations

The "Struggle" Movement

7. Classically, the anti - Ky regime "struggle" groups which have recently sprung up in several I Corps provinces and in the larger cities and towns should prove an easy and appealing Communist target. The struggle groups are in fact organized and led

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primarily by the Buddhist clergy. On the surface, they constitute a myriad confederation of student, worker, shopkeeper, and civil service groups with some support from individual units of the armed forces, and individual opportunists. This organizational structure, with affiliated functional groups, is similar to that of the Viet Cong's own National Liberation Front, and some of the techniques of the struggle movement are almost as brutal as those of the Communists. Strong-arm tactics, for example, have often been used to force participation in struggle-sponsored strikes and parades.

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8. [The evidence indicates that the Communists anticipated an outbreak of Buddhist protest activity this spring and that they apparently layed plans for action in Hue and Da Nang aimed at infiltrating and influencing it.] There is no hard information on the exact objectives of the Viet Cong, but it seems probable that their main strategy was to turn the movement as far as possible into anti-American channels so that the agitation against Ky would serve the main Communist goal of getting the US out of South Vietnam. This can be deduced from the content of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese radio propaganda which has sought to identify the struggle movement with the "people's movement" as represented by the Viet Cong. Hanoi and the Viet Cong hailed the initial appearance of anti-US themes among the strugglers as evidence that the urban areas were now moving toward a truly mass movement which would sweep out the US and would not be diverted by internal changes of government in Saigon. The Viet Cong radio termed the dissidents a "progressive opposition" force of "considerable size."

9. At the same time, Communist propaganda has contained a note of caution in dealing with the struggle movement which seems in keeping with Viet Cong efforts to exploit dissident non-Communist elements in South Vietnam, while refraining from complete identification with them or with their objectives. Communist propaganda, for example, has been warning against "tricks" by which the prospect of a genuine anti-US uprising might be thwarted by a possible accommodation between the government and "traitorous" opposition elements. In other words, the Communists regard the struggle movement as useful, but not

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particularly dependable. Captured Communist documents dealing with the movement, in fact, indicate that the Viet Cong hope to be able to use it to discredit certain opposition religious and political leaders who, they unctuously say, are "exploiting the people's movement for their own purposes."

10. The actual degree of success which the Communists have achieved in exploiting the struggle movement is unfortunately far from clear as yet. |

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It would seem likely that Viet Cong have attempted to penetrate the Hue movement. In Nha Trang, at least one student arrested by the authorities during demonstrations admitted she had been recently recruited by the Viet Cong. In Saigon, the Viet Cong are considered to have had a hand in some of the violence which occurred during demonstrations by Buddhist youth in early April.

13. Taken as a whole, however, the evidence does not support a conclusion that the Viet Cong have managed to acquire substantial leverage within the struggle movement. The apparent failure of the Communists to provide any significant support to the struggle leaders before the collapse of their strongholds in Da Nang is suggestive of a lack of interdependent connections between the two groups. It also tends to reinforce the conclusion that, while the Communists regard the struggle movement as a useful tool for exploitation, they are either unable or unwilling at present to make a strong military or political commitment to its support.

Youth and Students

14. The youth organizations and the high school and college students of South Vietnam have long been a primary target of the Communists. Evidence of Communist proselytization and recruitment efforts, and of the existence of Communist cells in youth organizations and schools, has been extensively reported for many years. The Viet Cong regard the high schools as a source for acquiring supporters who can later be infiltrated into the colleges. The high schools are also useful as a source for Communist military and agent recruitment.

15. Despite these long-term Communist efforts, youth as a whole in the urban areas of South Vietnam is not responsive to Viet Cong influence. University students in particular have proved relatively invulnerable to Communist blandishments, partly because the bulk of them are of middle class background. Many aspire to careers in government or are eager to avoid personal involvement in the war. At present there are only four universities in South Vietnam with some 21,000 students, 16,000 of them at Saigon University.

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The students at this college have tended to be restrained in their political actions over the past year and their student associations have also tended toward the conservative side.

16. There are indications that a substantial element of Communist sympathizers exists among the student body at Hue University, where a variety of influences operate, many of an extremist nature. There is, for example, a core of radical professors at Hue, some of them alleged to be pro-Communist. The militant Buddhist leadership in the city also exerts an influence on the university.

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17. Accusations that the Hue University faculty is heavily penetrated by Communists or pro-Communists frequently arise

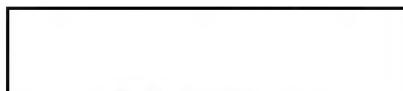
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and cannot be verified. However, several faculty members, including Rector Bui Tuong Huan, Dean of the Medical Faculty Le Khac Quyen, Dean of the Science Faculty Ton That Hanh, and Professor of Pedagogy Le Tuyen, were active in sponsoring a leftist revolutionary movement--the "People's Salvation Councils"--in I and II Corps in late 1964. This movement, antigovernment and strongly anti-military in outlook, contained the trappings of a possible Communist political vehicle and in some provinces became openly dominated by Communists before it was curbed by Buddhist leader Tri Quang and quietly dropped by its promoters.

Labor

18. Another of the Viet Cong's top priority targets has long been the worker organizations and unions in the cities of South Vietnam. Some captured enemy documents give the impression that the Communists have been fairly successful in their subversion efforts among labor groups, hinting, for example, that the

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"urban struggle" among other target elements should be brought up to a par with the Communist effort in the labor field.

19. It is clear that the Communists have scored some significant inroads among the textile workers around Saigon. These workers are predominantly women of Chinese extraction who have been subjected to very severe managerial policies. The Communists have exploited their resulting discontent and gained considerable influence with some of them. In late 1964, certain Communist-penetrated textile unions were expelled from the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT), the largest and most important of the country's trade unions.

20. There has also been some evidence of Viet Cong influence among transportation workers, particularly cyclodrivers, dockworkers, and construction workers, but no real indication that the leadership, where unions exist, is pro-Communist. In rural areas during the past year, the Viet Cong have greatly extended their influence over rubber plantation workers, nominally affiliated with the CVT. Although Communist inroads are probably in some cases due to outright subversion, the primary reason for increased Viet Cong presence on the plantations is the government's inability to offer protection or to prevent the Viet Cong from seeking sanctuary, demanding material supplies, and imposing their own unions on the plantation workers.

21. For the most part it appears that Communist influence in the labor field is much more significant among the rank and file workers than among union leadership. Union leaders in general are still fairly conservative, and so far have managed to maintain control of the major unions. CVT president Tran Quoc Buu, for example, although concerned about Communist subversion efforts, effectively controls his union. Most of the other smaller unions are similarly alert to Viet Cong subversive efforts.

22. Government officials are inclined to watch labor activities especially carefully, and thus are a positive force for blocking Viet Cong penetration

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efforts. It is probable that Communist influence in labor within the urban areas of South Vietnam is still well within containable bounds and will not prove a critical factor in the foreseeable future if caution and good leadership continue to be exercised.

III. The Vulnerability of Religious Groups

The Buddhists

23. It appears that the Viet Cong, while eager to exploit Buddhist disruptive tactics, are wary of the political aspirations of the Buddhists, viewing them as an undesirable counterweight to Communist interests in South Vietnam. Their concern was spurred by the Buddhist campaign against Diem in 1963, after which captured documents show that the Communists stepped up their efforts to infiltrate Buddhist ranks. According to the documents, the Communists aimed in part at properly "motivating the Buddhists" by opposing the "harmful policies" of the Buddhist Institute in Saigon and some of its affiliates in I Corps.

24. The more militant bonzes are seeking to expand Buddhist influence among the same basic target groups where the Viet Cong are active. They have, moreover, used some of the political methods of the Communists. Through the organizational frame of the United Buddhist Association with its grass roots structure in the pagodas, the bonzes have been able to pull in youth and students as an important part of the personnel for their protests and demonstrations. They have also sought support from the workers, the military, and the civil service.

25. Buddhist students, mostly from Hue University, have fanned out into the provinces to organize support, while students from the Buddhist-run "Bo De" high schools have often formed the core of public demonstrations, along with the Buddhist-supported orphans. Workers, although apparently compelled in some cases to support recent protest activity, have since at least mid-1964 been subjected to intensive Buddhist efforts to set up religious committees within

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unions. The Buddhists have shown considerable interest in the troublesome textile unions around Saigon. The gradual expansion of the Buddhist chaplain service in the armed forces since mid-1964 has operated together with Buddhist committees in the army to influence the attitudes of rank and file troops.

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26. During the struggle agitation in March and April, Buddhist chaplains in I Corps openly appealed to troops to obey Buddhist wishes. [Similar appeals have been made by monks traveling in II Corps.] South Vietnam's 1st Army Division, under a general sympathetic to the Buddhists, has supported the "struggle," as have various other local units.

27. By May of 1965, the Viet Cong were sufficiently concerned to warn their cadres against Buddhist political ambitions, including the possibility that a Buddhist state might be set up. The cadres were told that Buddhist objectives often did not coincide with those of the Viet Cong, that some Buddhists have become "US henchmen," that some work with "reactionary parties," and that others are "fervent nationalists." Viet Cong documents have urged stepped up "proselyting" among the Buddhists, including careful and cautious assessments of religious activities and personalities. It seems probable, in fact, that Viet Cong efforts to combat the bonzist influence have now become a major focus of Communist activities in connection with the Buddhists.

28. So far, it does not appear that the Viet Cong have been very successful in penetrating the leadership of the Buddhist movement. Although there has long been speculation about the possible Communist affinities or sympathies of the militant monk Tri Quang, no firm evidence has been uncovered to link him with the Viet Cong or the National Liberation Front. Communist propaganda has openly described Thich Tam Chau, chairman of the Buddhist Institute, as a "US puppet," and documents show that Communist cadres have been ordered to "unmask" him and his associates. The Viet Cong have also attacked Thich Quang Lien, sponsor of an abortive peace movement which called for withdrawal of both US and Communist forces from South Vietnam, and Thich Ho Giac, firebrand orator who has recently been urging government troops to obey Buddhist orders.

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29. For a time in early 1965, the Buddhist leaders had authorized a quiet anti-Communist campaign by their Institute and its various provincial organizations, but this effort gradually ceased except for vague pronouncements. Publicly and privately, Buddhist leaders deny any interest in a negotiated settlement with the Communists prior to Communist defeat, or any desire for a neutralist solution, although they openly declare that peace in Vietnam is their goal.

30. Despite the discipline which the Buddhist monks appear able to exert over followers in their political campaigns, it is questionable whether they are in fact in full control of them. The Buddhist youths who--in concert with a possibly Communist-infiltrated labor faction--apparently instigated anti-US demonstrations in Saigon on 1 May 1966 have told reporters that they are responsive to Tri Quang, but Vietnamese and US officials believe them to be Communist-influenced. There is little question but that the ranks of students and youths willing to enlist in Buddhist political activities are vulnerable to Viet Cong infiltration, and there is little evidence of Buddhist efforts to turn down or screen out such infiltrators. It has also been reported that many former Viet Cong, apprehended and released, enter the monasteries as places of permanent refuge.

Other Religious Sects

31. The Communists definitely have poor prospects for subverting the bulk of South Vietnam's Catholic population, many of whom are recent refugees from Communism in North Vietnam. Viet Cong documents, however, do treat the question of proselytizing among rural Catholics and, in at least one province, the Communists have ordered local party committees to assign a cadre to operations among the Catholics. The Viet Cong are also careful to have a Catholic priest among the Liberation Front Central Committee members, and to avoid any suggestion of disrespect for the religion.

32. There is similarly little evidence that the Viet Cong have made substantial inroads among the Cao Dai or Hoa Hao sects, although some individuals

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or groups within these sects undoubtedly support the Communists. Both sects have tended to resist Viet Cong encroachment into their traditional delta strongholds. There has, however, been some suggestion of tacit "live-and-let-live" arrangements among local Viet Cong and the sects in the delta, with the Communists presumably refraining from serious harassment in return for transit and provisioning rights.

IV. Political Parties and Intellectuals

33. Despite frequent allegations by various Vietnamese political figures that their chief opponents have Communist or at least neutralist sympathies, there is little indication that the Viet Cong have made much headway in trying to subvert South Vietnam's intellectuals and politicians. Up to the present time, no politically prominent South Vietnamese have openly associated themselves with the Viet Cong or its National Liberation Front organization.

34. Viet Cong tactics with the main political parties in South Vietnam, the Nationalist (VNQDD) and Dai Viet parties, appear primarily defensive in nature. The leaders of these parties are often denounced openly as "puppets" and "reactionaries" and are similarly denigrated in the Communists' own records. Captured Communist documents suggest that little effort is made by the Viet Cong to influence such parties.

35. Captured enemy documents also suggest that there is very little affinity between the Communists and individual politicians or the intellectual elite. A Viet Cong directive captured in February 1966 alerted cadres in one region near Saigon to the fact that intellectuals and "middle bourgeois" were extending their activities to the provinces and should be closely monitored. The document noted that while "a progressive faction has been joining the Front," the majority is "non-aligned and adopts the attitude of "wait-and-see," and a small faction is more and more "overtly reactionary."

36. This document also indicated that contacts between the Communists and the non-Communist urban

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elements are fairly easy and apparently often initiated by the intellectuals themselves. The document stated that some "intermediary groups" among the non-aligned element were sounding out the Viet Cong concerning terms for ending the war. The intellectuals indicated, however, that they hoped to preserve some "bourgeois control" over a future government in the event of Communist victory. The two major groups so involved at the time were identified by the document as a leftist journalist group, composed of anti-Ky southerners, and a "group of seven" who had openly called for an end to the war. Both groups were described by the Viet Cong as "reactionary" and "anti-foreign," and as "temporarily advantageous to us, but dangerous in the long term."

V. Armed Forces

37. The Communists have made intensive efforts to infiltrate and subvert South Vietnam's armed forces. "Military proselyting," involving propaganda and other forms of pressure on government troops, is one of the key tenets of the Viet Cong insurgency effort. It is often given equal priority with military action in Communist directives.

38. Each Communist party echelon, from the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN)--the top coordinating authority--down through the regional, provincial, district, and village committees contains a military proselyting section. Military proselyting activities consist not only of trying to contact and win over, or otherwise demoralize, government troops directly, but of a widespread campaign to reach and influence the troops through their families. One of the principal aims of this effort is to encourage desertions or, if possible, outright defections to the Viet Cong. The rate of government military defections to the Viet Cong is not known, but it is believed small in relation to total government desertions.

39. Similar proselyting efforts are directed against captured government troops. Communist directives indicate that the Viet Cong are exhorted

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to treat prisoners leniently and to try to convince them of the justice of the Liberation Front cause. As in the case of captured Americans, this effort is often designed to elicit favorable propaganda statements from the prisoners, and in the case of at least some South Vietnamese troops, eventual adherence to the Viet Cong forces. However, the Viet Cong frequently release South Vietnamese prisoners to mark holidays or other special occasions, and there is little to indicate that a sizable portion of ex-prisoners make unreliable soldiers when returned to their government units.

40. Communist infiltration of South Vietnam's armed forces is probably widespread. No estimate has even been attempted of the possible proportion of Viet Cong agents serving in the government military services, but there have been numerous instances of treachery by government troops, probably sparked by such agents. Betrayal occurs most frequently among paramilitary troops--the Regional and Popular Forces and the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups.

41. The degree of penetration of the regular army is more difficult to assess, although it has long been apparent that scarcely any military operation conducted by government forces is carried out without enemy foreknowledge. In part, this is due to unreliable government communications, which Communist prisoners and ralliers freely admit are monitored. However, a document captured in October 1965 illustrated the emphasis given by the Viet Cong to the development of agent networks in the army, its special branches, military schools, strategic garrisons, and officer corps, especially at the company-grade level.

42. Subversive activities aimed at South Vietnam's armed forces serve a dual military and political purpose. The military advantage is obvious--warning of government operations, information on government military strengths and weaknesses, inside data for planned Viet Cong operations and, if possible, defections with weapons to swell Viet Cong forces. On the political side, subversive and proselytizing efforts have the primary purpose of undermining the government's will to fight by sowing

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doubts among South Vietnamese troops in both the government's cause and its prospects of victory. Ultimately, the Communists probably hope that their subversive efforts will make the government prone to internal collapse under the pressure of a few dramatic Viet Cong military successes or of serious political or economic crises on the government side.

43. To date, despite instances of defection and treachery in government troops, despite both military setbacks and political upheavals, and despite unusually high desertion rates among South Vietnam's armed forces, there has been little evidence of any marked success by the Viet Cong subversive effort against the regular armed forces. The ability of the government troops to continue fighting during periods of political turmoil and heavy military setbacks is perhaps a measure of the poor alternative offered by the Viet Cong in competing for the allegiance of South Vietnam's army. Contributing to the loyalty of the regular forces is the firmness of US military assistance, the efforts by Saigon--with US prodding--to improve the pay and benefits of military service, and the far superior combat conditions and survival chances of government troops as compared to those of the Viet Cong.

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